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ABSTRACT

Four-hour internships have been a requirement for nonteaching geography majors at Illinois State University (Normal) since 1987. A 2-hour pre-internship seminar, taught every spring, is also required. In this course, students learn of internship possibilities; develop resumes and cover letters; participate in a video-taped mock interview; receive a copy of the Professional Practice Packet detailing the rationale behind internships and the responsibilities of student, supervisor, and instructor; and write an essay setting forth their plans and objectives with regard to interning. Files maintained by the instructor contain names and addresses and particulars about internships as well as brochures, products, reports, and the like from the various intern employers. Most internships are undertaken in the summer to allow a full-time experience similar to real working conditions. Interns are paid by the employers. The supervising instructor visits as many summer interns at their job sites as possible and maintains contact with the employers throughout the year through phone calls, visits, and a newsletter. The list of intern employers was developed by first targeting the areas from which most of the students originated, then by using the yellow pages, word-of-mouth, the job placement center of the University, and the Student Conservation Association which provided catalogs and application materials from their clients. A map of Illinois indicating summer residencies for geography students, 1987-1989, is included. (JB)

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GEOGRAPHY INTERNSHIPS: FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS

A Paper Presented at the Annual
Meeting of the Association of
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GEOGRAPHY INTERNSHIPS: FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS

Before you stands a missionary, a missionary intent on spreading the word about internships. During my presentation, I will highlight for you changes that have occurred in our approach since I suggested four years ago that our nonteaching geography majors should have to complete a required internship. I will also discuss the pre-internship course that I now teach each spring and offer you ideas on building and maintaining a list of internship opportunities.

From Voluntary to Required: Geography Internships at Illinois State

I sold the idea of a required internship as a capstone experience. Our geography education majors had a capstone experience--student teaching. Our geology majors had theirs--six weeks of field camp in South Dakota. But nonteaching geography majors--the bulk of our geography majors--had until the internship no required culminating experience. Most just graduated and left although a few (about 30 percent for the first half of the 1980s) interned for credit on a voluntary basis. Those voluntary internships, however, tended to be local, planning-related, unpaid, part-time, and not as career-enhancing as we would have liked.

December of 1985 stands out as a key month in this little success story. Our proposal for requiring four semester hours of internship went forward to the college early that month. And on December 17, 1985, I, a departmental colleague, and a job developer from the University's Office of Professional

Practice left campus at 5 a.m. in a blinding snowstorm on our first internship mission to Chicago and environs.

Our pre-December 1985 internship program suffered from several shortcomings. Our new program features the following adjustments.

First, as you now know, we have moved from a voluntary to a required internship. We were the first of what I call the traditional liberal arts disciplines to do so at Illinois State. The four-hour internship requirement has now been in place two years. Most of the majors in my seminar this semester are working out of catalogs for which an internship is still an elective. Two years from now most will be in catalogs that offer no option.

Second, we decided to focus internships in the summer. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this decision. A summer focus allows students to intern full-time rather than trying to juggle on-campus classes with short stints at a nearby agency or firm. A full-time internship benefits both student and employer in that the student shows up for work every day--just as he or she would as a real employee. Interns get a much better feel for the world of work when it hits them in the face every morning. A summer focus releases the student from the local area. The student can go where the internships are rather than trying to find one within a few miles of campus. A summer focus allows me to have all the upcoming crop of interns in my spring-only Seminar in Geography.

Third, I vowed to do everything possible to secure a subsidy for our interns. When an employer pays an intern, that employer takes an especially close interest in what the intern is doing. Many places I have signed up either never had interns before or they used them free of charge. I try to make internships look so attractive that employers want to pay our people.

Fourth, we knew we had to break out of the planning-related mode if we were to serve all our nonteaching majors. A review of our 1989 list reveals many planning possibilities but also opportunities in environmental management, production cartography, automated cartography, stereo-plotting, historical geography, and so forth.

Finally, I knew the internship program had to have a champion--someone who was committed to the idea and had the wherewithal to make it work. I was department chair in 1985; and when I looked around for that champion, the choice was clear. I would have to do it myself.

From Winter to Summer: Preparations for Professional Practice

We in the Department talked many times about dropping the required, two-hour course we now call Seminar in Geography. When I came to Illinois State, we called it Methods and Concepts in American Geography. I never had anything to do with the course then, but those who did usually threw up their hands and went on to something else. Instead of a philosophical treatment of the discipline, our graduating seniors want to know how they can make it on the outside. The level and required status of this course perfectly suited my needs for a vehicle in which to mold my prospective interns. If the course had not existed, I would have created it.

I begin promoting the idea of internships on the first day of Seminar and never let up. Students do an assigned reading on the benefits of interning and then discuss it with the members of their team (Harayda 1986). In class students listen for two periods as I reveal the dozens of internship opportunities available to them for the coming summer. They get a list of colleges that allow students from other colleges to live in their residence halls or

student apartments during the summer. Students receive a copy of our Professional Practice Packet. From the packet they, their parents, and the employers learn the rationale for professional practice and find out about the responsibilities of student, supervisor, and instructor. The packet contains a variety of forms significant to the experience. All students in the Seminar must write an essay explaining their plans with respect to interning during the coming summer. Those that choose not to intern tell me why. Those that will intern lay out their goals and their top choices for the experience. All Seminar students, whether they intern or not, must have on file with me a letter-perfect one-page resume. They use these, plus cover letters they write for the class, when application time arrives. They find names, addresses, and particulars about internships in a card file I developed and maintain. Students also have access to file folders in which I keep brochures, products, reports, and the like from the various intern employers. I even have my own distinctive notepaper to help spread the good word.

Late in March students submit through me applications to as many as three intern employers. Previous experience tells us three is about the right number since most get their first choice. Each application consists of a cover letter addressed to an employer and an appropriate resume. I then write my own letter to each employer and mail together all applications to a single employer. My letter helps authenticate the applications and allows me to comment on and compare the applicants. Employers know from the outset that I am going to screen students for them. Sometimes I will not allow a student to apply when I know the match between student and employer is apt to be a poor one.

April is an anxious month for students. They are to wait ten days after

I mail the packages and then call employers to learn the status of their application. I use a weekly checklist to keep track of who has talked to whom. Student procrastination can become a serious nuisance at this stage, so I keep after them. During April students also have anxiety attacks over a videotaped, dress-for-success, graded, mock interview they must do in our career center. The interviewer assumes the role of the intern employer and asks not only general questions but also questions appropriate to the hoped-for internship.

Internship placement activities typically drag on into May. Many students have a confirmation by final exam time (roughly May 10), but some will not get the word for weeks. The federal government has to be the worst offender in extending the uncertainty. ISU has a liberal summer registration policy, however, so we can handle late confirmations.

From Me to You: Tips on Building and Maintaining Your List

I try to visit as many summer interns at their job sites as possible. These trips provide not only a chance to check out the internship arrangement but also allow me to strengthen old bonds with employers and recruit new employers for our list. In the time that remains, I will share with you some thoughts about building a list of employers and maintaining it.

Before beginning to build a list of employers, you need to know something about the summer distribution pattern of your students. Students will often find temporary summer accommodations if the internship is right for them and the pay is life sustaining, but concentrations of permanent addresses for your majors is an excellent place to begin. I knew from looking at maps such as Figure 1 that I had to make serious progress in the Chicago area and selected

central Illinois communities if our new thrust was to succeed.

Once you have targeted the areas in which you wish to develop jobs, use the yellow pages. Our chief point of reference for that snow-plagued December 1985 trip to Chicago was the "Maps and Globes" section of the Chicagoland yellow pages. We called ahead, made five appointments, and took off. Other sources of employers in an area include newspaper ads, newspaper stories, journal ads (like those in Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing), tips from alumni, lists of applied geographers, lists of nonacademics attending conferences, and internship directories. If developing jobs for interns becomes a priority for you, your antennae will be poised always to pick up the scent. Some scents pay off. Some do not. But, for me, the chase sure is fun.

Students can be an excellent source, too. I encourage them to think about possibilities in their home areas or elsewhere. Last year, for instance, a young lady taking Seminar used spring break to track down a lead she got through her grandmother. Her grandmother had heard from a friend, who had a granddaughter working for a map production firm a hundred miles from my student's home, that the firm might be looking for someone with scribing talent. My student visited the firm over break, brought back literature and encouraging news, applied, interned there, won a permanent job for herself, and provided us the chance of subsequent placements for our interns.

Our Professional Practice Office supports us in many ways. They send me notices of possible positions appropriate for geographers. They make travel money available so I can visit my interns and develop new slots. They hold workshops for coordinators and hold our hand when things go awry.

One final source of jobs deserves commentary--the Student Conservation

Association or SCA. We have had excellent luck finding out-of-the-way environment-related placements through the SCA. They provide me with catalogs and application materials. Their clients, agencies like the Bureau of Land Management, take great care of our students. To help you start or improve an internship program, I cannot think of a better single source than the SCA.

Once you have your list of job opportunities for interns, you must nurture it. I have several suggestions.

Screen your students carefully so that the the match will be as nearly perfect as possible. If you have a scratchy employer, do not send someone who will irritate said employer. If you have a high-class opportunity, send them only high-quality applicants. You can always find a place for your lower quality students, but high caliber jobs are tough to replace.

Minimize the paperwork responsibility of the employer. We have simple forms that the employer and student complete at the outset of the experience and a one-page evaluation form for the supervisor at the end.

Keep in touch with your employers. I telephone many of ours in January or February as I prepare the list for the upcoming summer. I sometimes call them at other times just to chat. Visit them whenever possible. Most of my employers seem genuinely gratified (if not amazed) that a professor would take the time to stop by. Use the U.S. Mail to help maintain those bonds. Our Geography Newsletter editor leaves me space for comments about the internship program. I always use the space and have added many of our intern employers to the Newsletter mailing list. Even when we do not have an intern for them, they know we are still thinking of them. I even send employers a Christmas card, which Professional Practice makes available.

Get yourself some sort of certificate to show your appreciation. We

frame ours and use it to signify employment over the years of at least five ISU geography interns.

Finally, be receptive when employers call or write for help. They call me to advertise jobs, check on appropriate salaries before advertising, volunteer to visit classes, offer to donate equipment, and so forth.

From Good News to Bad: Closure

After all this good news, what is the bad news about geography internships. So far, I can honestly think of none.

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Summer Residences For Seminar in Geography Students: 1987, 1988, 1989.

FIGURE 1